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Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, House of Representatives

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NATIONAL FORESTS

Special Recreation Areas Not Meeting Established Objectives

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The Honorable Bruce F. Vento
Chairman, Subcommittee on National
Parks and Public Lands
Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This report responds to your request that we review the Forest Service's management of special recreation areas. The report assesses whether these areas have been developed, operated, and maintained as provided for in designating legislation, Forest Service policy, and the individual plans the Forest Service has developed for them.

Copies of the report are also being sent to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Chief of the Forest Service. We will make copies available to others upon request.

This work was performed under the direction of James Duffus III, Director, Natural Resources Management Issues, (202) 275-7756. Other major contributors are listed in appendix III.

Sincerely yours,

J. Dexter Peach
Assistant Comptroller General

Executive Summary

Purpose

Between 1965 and 1988, the Congress designated 25 areas within the national forest system as unique or special. These areas offer some of the most outstanding scenery and varied recreation opportunities available on forest lands.

Concerned that the Forest Service has not developed and managed these areas to levels consistent with their special designations, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, asked GAO to determine whether these areas are being developed, operated, and maintained as provided for in legislation, Forest Service policy, and the individual plans the Forest Service has developed for them.

Background

Special recreation areas are designated by specific legislative acts. Typically, the legislation directs the Secretary of Agriculture to manage these areas in a manner that best provides for public outdoor recreation benefits and the conservation of scenic, scientific, historic, and other values. Details on implementing these general goals were most often left to the discretion of the Secretary of Agriculture, who administers these areas through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. GAO reviewed 20 of the 25 specially designated areas. The remaining five areas were not included in GAO's review because four did not have recreation as their primary purpose and the other was designated after GAO began its review. The 20 areas range in size from 6,600 acres to over 2 million acres and cumulatively include about 6.3 million acres.

Forest Service policy calls for these special recreation areas to be managed as showcases to demonstrate national forest management standards for programs, services, and facilities. While the policy does not define the term "showcase," Forest Service officials interpret it to mean that these areas should be developed and managed to a noticeably higher standard than other Forest Service recreation units. The Forest Service has developed detailed area plans for all but the most recently designated area. The plans include a list of necessary facilities, recreation experiences to be provided, and management direction for other resources and activities in the area.

Results in Brief

Many of the special recreation areas have not been developed, operated, and maintained up to the levels and standards called for in Forest Service policy and the individual area plans. For example, special recreation area officials reported to GAO that planned projects at 10 of 20 areas

have been either delayed or dropped, and visitor information services were inadequate and/or maintenance levels have been reduced at 15 of the 20 areas.

Officials at the special recreation areas told GAO that funding shortfalls in the early to mid-1980s were often the cause of the problems in facility development, visitor information services, and maintenance levels. Over the last 3 years, funding for these areas has been increased, and the Forest Service has developed other initiatives—such as greater use of volunteers and encouragement of contributions from both public and private sources—to help offset funding shortfalls. However, officials at these areas told GAO that these increases and initiatives are not likely to bring the areas up to the standards called for in Forest Service policy.

Information on progress made, deferments, and future resource needs to develop, operate, and maintain these areas up to the levels called for in Forest Service policy and plans is not readily available. Without this detailed information, neither the Forest Service nor the Congress can make sound decisions on the appropriate levels of funding or the time frames for meeting the objectives detailed in the areas' plans.

Principal Findings

Many Special Recreation Areas Not Meeting Planned Objectives

Many of the special recreation areas fell short of the expectations established for them in Forest Service policy or the individual area plans. This has occurred both in the extent of facility development and the level at which they have been operated and maintained.

Officials at 10 of the 20 areas reported to GAO that planned projects—such as campgrounds, road improvements, and information stations—have been delayed or dropped altogether. Eight of the 10 areas that reported delaying or dropping projects were designated before 1980. Plans for these older areas had generally envisioned relatively large-scale facility development. In contrast, only 2 of the 12 areas designated since 1980 reported delaying or dropping projects. The plans for these more recently designated areas generally focused more on the preservation of natural resources and called for limited development.

Officials at 15 of the 20 special recreation areas told GAO that visitor information or interpretive services were inadequate and or that maintenance levels have been lowered. For example, at Sawtooth National Recreation Area in Idaho, eight rangers patrolled 247 miles of wilderness trail during 1980, providing information and assistance to visitors. In 1988, only one ranger was available to provide such services. At Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area in California, maintenance at the swimming beaches had been deferred for the last 15 years. An area official told GAO that these beaches are no longer desirable places to swim because nearly all the sand on the beaches has eroded, leaving a strand of rocks, mud, and weeds at the water's edge.

Shortfalls Linked to Funding Limitations

Special recreation area officials told GAO that funding shortfalls were often the cause of delays in facility development, the inadequacy of visitor services, and lower maintenance levels. Between fiscal years 1980 and 1986, Forest Service funding for its recreation programs (of which the special recreation areas are only a small part) declined about 26 percent, from about $170 million to $127 million (in constant 1989 dollars). According to Forest Service officials, during this period special recreation areas were generally not given higher priority or additional emphasis and suffered similar funding declines. Although the Forest Service has experienced increases in recreation funding in fiscal years 1987-89, the fiscal year 1989 level was still below the 1980 level in terms of constant 1989 dollars. Special recreation area officials also told GAO that the higher levels of funding are still insufficient to achieve the showcase levels of operations called for in Forest Service policy.

Forest Service Initiatives to Offset Funding Shortfalls

In April 1988, the Forest Service issued its National Recreation Strategy, which gives special attention to showcasing recreation at special recreation areas. The strategy calls for stretching available federal dollars through greater use of volunteers and through seeking out public and private groups to share the expense of developing, repairing, and operating facilities. In fiscal year 1988, these areas received about $168,000, or about 2 percent of their recreation budgets, from a public-private recreation cost-share program. Although this strategy may help, GAO believes that the limited amount of resources provided through this strategy are not likely to enable the Forest Service to achieve its planned levels of facility development and showcase levels of operation.

Status of Special Recreation Area Planned Objectives Not Adequately Monitored and Reported

In managing most of its special recreation areas, the Forest Service has not adequately monitored and reported on the status of development and operations. Area officials were often unable to provide GAO with documentation detailing planned, actual, and scheduled project completions. GAO found one area—Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument—where officials tracked, updated, and reported progress and accomplishments annually against the objectives stated in the area plan. Similar information for all the special recreation areas would assist the Forest Service and the Congress in making decisions on funding levels and time frames for meeting the objectives established for these areas.

Recommendation

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture direct the Chief of the Forest Service to develop information on and periodically report the status of development, operations, and maintenance at each special recreation area to the Congress. Such information should, as a minimum, include (1) aspects of each area's plan that have been completed, (2) aspects of the plan that have yet to be completed, (3) the proposed time frame and the estimated costs associated with completing the work necessary to fulfill the plan, and (4) an assessment of the resources needed to operate and maintain these areas at showcase levels.

Agency Comments

GAO obtained the views of officials directly responsible for the program and incorporated their comments in the report where appropriate. At the request of the Subcommittee Chairman, however, GAO did not obtain written comments on this report. Forest Service officials said they generally concurred with GAO's recommendation.

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Abbreviations

GAO	General Accounting Office
NM	National Monument
NRA	National Recreation Area
NSA	National Scenic Area
NMEA	National Management Emphasis Area
NSRA	National Scenic Research Area

Chapter 1

Introduction

Between 1965 and 1988, the Congress created 25 special recreation areas within lands administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. The enabling legislation generally calls for providing public outdoor recreation and protecting scenic, natural, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment. In general, the designating legislative acts for these areas establish broad purposes, but leave the details on implementation to the discretion of the Secretary of Agriculture, who administers these areas through the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. Current Forest Service policy calls for these areas to be managed as showcases to demonstrate the highest National Forest management standards.

Characteristics of Special Recreation Areas

Each special recreation area within national forest lands has been designated by a specific act of the Congress as a National Recreation Area, National Monument, National Scenic Area, National Scenic Research Area, or National Management Emphasis Area. The Forest Service has defined these five categories as follows:

- National Recreation Areas. These areas have outstanding combinations of outdoor recreation opportunities, scenery, and proximity to potential users. They may also have cultural, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment.
- National Monuments. These areas have unique ecological, geologic, historic, prehistoric, cultural, or scientific interests.
- National Scenic Areas. These areas contain outstanding scenic characteristics, recreation values, and geologic, ecological, and cultural resources.
- National Scenic Research Areas. These areas contain outstandiag scenic values for research, scientific, and recreational purposes.
- National Management Emphasis Areas. This category comprises the areas that do not fit the four other categories. Areas with this designation contain unique or outstanding physical features and specific physical, cultural, or political characteristics receiving specific emphasis in the legislation.

We reviewed 20 of the 25 areas so designated on Forest Service lands, including 13 National Recreation Areas, 3 National Monuments, 3 National Scenic Areas, and 1 National Management Emphasis Area, as

listed in table 1.1.[1] In total, these 20 areas comprise about 6.3 million acres. Individually, they range in size from Misty Fiords National Monument in Alaska, which contains more than 2 million acres, to Pine Ridge National Recreation Area in Nebraska, which contains less than 7,000 acres.

Table 1.1: Congressionally Designated Forest Service Special Recreation Areas

Name	Designation[a]	Date established	State(s)	Approximate acreage
Spruce Knob Seneca Rocks	NRA	1965	West Virginia	100,000
Shasta Trinity	NRA	1965	California	212,000
Mount Rogers	NRA	1966	Virginia	154,000
Flaming Gorge	NRA	1968	Utah Wyoming	201,300
Oregon Dunes	NRA	1972	Oregon	34,000
Sawtooth	NRA	1972	Idaho	756,000
Hells Canyon	NRA	1975	Oregon Idaho	652,500
Arapaho	NRA	1978	Colorado	35,700
Rattlesnake	NRA	1980	Montana	61,000
Admiralty Island	NM	1980	Alaska	969,600
Misty Fiords	NM	1980	Alaska	2,294,300
Mount St Helens	NM	1982	Washington	110,000
White Rocks	NRA	1984	Vermont	36,400
Oregon Cascades	NMEA	1984	Oregon	156,900
Mount Baker	NRA	1984	Washington	8,600
North Cascades	NSA	1984	Washington	87,600
Mono Basin	NSA	1984	California	115,600
Allegheny	NRA	1984	Pennsylvania	23,100
Pine Ridge	NRA	1986	Nebraska	6,600
Columbia River Gorge	NSA	1986	Oregon Washington	285,100
Total acres				**6,300,300**

[a]NRA National Recreation Area, NM National Monument, NMEA National Management Emphasis Area, NSA National Scenic Area

[b]Areas visited by GAO

[1]Three National Management Emphasis Areas and one National Scenic Research Area designated by the Congress were not included in our review because recreation was either not mentioned in the legislation or appeared secondary to the primary purpose of the act: Lake Tahoe Basin in Nevada and California (1980), Lee Metcalf Management Area in Montana (1983), Antone Bench Area in Utah (1984), and Cascade Head in Oregon (1974). The Winding Stair National Recreation Area in Oklahoma (October 1988) was also not included because it was designated after the start of this review.

Designating Legislation Varies Among Special Recreation Areas

The legislation that authorizes each special recreation area contains requirements that are unique for that area. Typically, the laws that designated these areas direct the Secretary of Agriculture to manage them in a manner that best provides for (1) public outdoor recreation benefits and (2) the conservation of scenic, scientific, historic, or other values. The emphasis and direction on the extent of recreational development have changed over time. Generally, the earliest designated areas were to have substantial facility development, while the more recently designated areas were to have less, if any, facility development.

Congressional Directives for Areas Have Changed Over Time

The types of special recreation areas and the purposes for establishing them have changed considerably over time. The first areas evolved from attempts in the 1960s to provide for the nation's growing recreation needs. In general, the first eight areas designated from 1965 through 1978 reflected congressional and executive branch interest in providing for high-capacity, all-purpose recreation. The laws designating them emphasized a wide range of recreation opportunities to draw people not only from cities in the general vicinity but from other states as well. In addition, the areas had potential for accommodating large numbers of people, and the envisioned recreation facilities would require large-scale capital investment by the federal government. For example, the law that established Sawtooth National Recreation Area in 1972 authorized $22.2 million for facility development.

By the 1980s, legislative designation of special recreation areas had changed dramatically. For most areas established after 1980, the legislation did not call for significant development of new recreation facilities. Instead, the legislation often included wilderness designations and emphasized continuation of past primitive recreation uses and preservation of the existing natural resources. Appendix II gives a description of the 20 special recreation areas we reviewed, listed in the chronological order they were designated. The differences in development levels in these areas can be seen in these descriptions.

Designating Laws Generally Not Specific on Recreation Facility Development

In general, the designating legislation for each of the special recreation areas does not require that specific recreation facilities be constructed. Details on implementing plans to achieve the general legislative goals established for each of these areas was most often left to the discretion of the Secretary of Agriculture and the Forest Service.

Forest Service Direction for Special Recreation Areas

The Forest Service first established its policy for special recreation areas in the late 1960s. The policy called for these areas to receive special emphasis and priority in protection and development and in the administration of their use commensurate with their specific congressional recognition as national recreation resources. The Forest Service policy and objectives for special recreation areas call for

- providing a showcase for National Forest management standards for programs, services, and facilities;
- providing for public enjoyment of the area for outdoor recreation or other benefits;
- protecting the special values and attributes of the area (that is, scenic, cultural, historic, wilderness, wildlife, or other values) that contribute to public enjoyment; and
- managing any other resources in the area in a manner that does not impair the public recreation values or the special attributes of the area.

While the term "showcase" is not defined, Forest Service special recreation area managers said that they interpret it to mean that they should manage these areas to a noticeably higher standard than other Forest Service units.

Special Recreation Area Plans Contain Development and Management Objectives

For each special recreation area, the Forest Service develops a management plan and incorporates management direction for the area in an overall plan for the entire forest. The areas' management plans are based on the management objectives in the implementing legislation and on the directives of the National Forest Management Act of 1976.[1]

The plans include a description of recreation experiences to be provided, a list of necessary recreation facilities, and management direction for other area resources, such as forest cover, forage, federally listed threatened and endangered flora and fauna, fish and wildlife, and minerals.

As of June 1988, 17 of the 20 areas either had final special recreation area plans or were covered by final overall forest plans. In addition, two area plans were included in draft forest plans. The remaining area, the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area in Oregon and Washington,

[1]The National Forest Management Act of 1976 amended the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 and directed that each National Forest prepare an overall plan to manage the lands and resources in the forest.

was designated in November 1986, and the Forest Service was still formulating a plan for this area.

The entire planning process may take up to 5 years and allows for extensive public involvement. When completed and approved, the plans specify the actions the Forest Service plans to take to develop and manage the area according to the designating law, Forest Service policy, and public input.

Forest Service funding allocations for the special recreation areas were not readily available for periods before fiscal year 1986. Detailed funding information for these areas for fiscal years 1986-89 is presented in appendix I. In fiscal year 1989, funding for these areas was about $28 million.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, asked us to

- provide information on the number of special recreation areas, the acreage they cover (see ch. 1), and their annual budgets (see app. I) and
- determine whether these areas are being developed, operated, and maintained as provided for in the designating legislation, Forest Service policy, and the individual plans the Forest Service has developed for them (see ch. 2 and 3).

To determine whether the special recreation areas are being developed and managed according to their legislated purposes and Forest Service policy, and as planned by the Forest Service, we reviewed the laws and legislative histories for each of the 20 areas. We asked officials of all 20 areas to provide us information on (1) major recreation objectives contained in their area plans and (2) the current implementation status of recreation facility development planned. We made site visits to nine of the areas, shown in table 1.1. We selected these nine areas because they represent a mix of sizes, recreation types, and geographic locations. We contacted Forest Service officials responsible for managing two additional areas (Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area in California and Oregon Cascades Recreation Area in Oregon) but did not visit the sites

[1]Our review focused on the recreational aspects of these areas. Management directions included in enabling legislation but not evaluated during our review include regulating the use of private land within the area, dealing with mineral rights, maintaining existing water rights, preserving fish and wildlife, conserving natural and cultural resources, and managing timber and grazing allocations.

because both areas were designated in 1984 and their area plans had not been completed.

For the nine areas visited, we compared the area plans' recreation objectives with their legislated purposes and the recreation facilities development that was called for with what had been accomplished. We discussed progress in meeting objectives with area and Forest Service headquarters, regional, and national forest officials and reviewed Forest Service funding trends. We also discussed the degree to which planned development has occurred with representatives of local governments and environmental groups for some of the areas.

To assess whether the areas were operated and maintained at showcase levels called for in Forest Service policy, we asked officials of the 20 areas for information on (1) the type and condition of current facilities, (2) the level of funding and staffing, and (3) the impact if any, funding limitations have had on meeting showcase levels for services and facilities. In addition, at the nine areas we visited, we toured the facilities with Forest Service staff to observe and document service and maintenance levels and facility condition. We also reviewed Forest Service-wide recreation funding and maintenance backlog data, and discussed area conditions and funding levels with cognizant Forest Service officials.

In April 1988, the Forest Service introduced a new National Recreation Strategy initiative intended to improve the quality of recreation opportunities offered on Forest Service land. We discussed the strategy with Forest Service headquarters, regional, and forest recreation staff, and with area officials to obtain their opinion of the strategy's strengths and limitations as they relate to special recreation areas. We also attended a jointly sponsored Forest Service and National Park Service National Recreation Symposium held in October 1988.

We conducted our work between March 1988 and September 1989 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. We obtained the views of Forest Service officials responsible for special recreation areas and incorporated them where appropriate. As requested, however, we did not obtain official written agency comments on this report.

Chapter 2

Many Special Recreation Areas Not Meeting Planned Objectives

Many of the special recreation areas fell short of the expectations established for them in Forest Service policy or in the individual plans for these areas, and did not approach showcase levels. These shortfalls have occurred both in the extent to which facilities have been developed and in the level at which they have been operated and maintained. More specifically:

- Officials at 10 of the 20 areas reported that planned projects have been either delayed or dropped.
- Officials of 15 of the 20 areas said that visitor information or interpretive services were inadequate and/or that maintenance or cleanup levels have been lowered. At eight of the nine areas we visited, we found examples of inadequate services and/or maintenance activities that were at levels below full-service standards.[1]

These conditions affect both the quality of a visitor's recreation experience and the value of the Forest Service's capital investments. Effects on recreation include difficulty in reaching scenic vistas, overcrowding in campgrounds, and inadequate information about an area's significant features. Insufficient maintenance may shorten the useful life of recreation facilities.

We obtained most of the information about these areas from officials at the individual special recreation areas because a central monitoring and information-reporting system about the progress and status of these areas does not exist.

Many Planned Facilities at Special Recreation Areas Not Completed

We asked officials of the 20 special recreation areas if recreation facility projects (such as campgrounds, roads, trails, and interpretive sites) called for in legislation or individual area plans had been developed as planned. Officials for 10 of the 20 areas reported delaying or dropping projects. Officials at all eight of the areas designated before 1980—areas in which large-scale facility development had been envisioned—reported delaying or dropping projects. Officials at eight areas reported that insufficient funding had contributed to facilities not being built. Descriptions of some projects delayed are shown in table 2.1.

[1]Forest Service full-service standards require that recreation sites be cleaned with sufficient regularity to give the appearance of being clean, sanitary, and well kept and that facility improvements be maintained to the standard to which originally constructed or subsequently improved.

Table 2.1: Special Recreation Areas Reporting Dropped Projects or Delays in Developing Planned Recreation Facilities

Area	Examples of delayed projects
Spruce Knob Seneca Rocks	Campgrounds, picnic areas, scenic drive
Shasta Trinity	Campgrounds, information station, visitor center
Mt. Rogers	Campgrounds
Flaming Gorge	Boat ramp, information site
Oregon Dunes	Viewpoint and information stations, visitor center, parking improvements
Sawtooth	Campgrounds, trailheads
Hells Canyon	Interpretive facilities, roads
Arapaho	Campgrounds, picnic area
Admiralty Island	Foot trails
Mount St. Helens	Viewpoint, parking improvements, picnic area

Details describing three examples of delayed or dropped projects at sites we visited are discussed below.

Hells Canyon National Recreation Area

Hells Canyon National Recreation Area in Oregon and Idaho contains the deepest canyon in the United States—even deeper than the Grand Canyon. As provided for in the area plan, the area was to include a wide range of recreation activities, including driving access to scenic overlooks of the canyon and boating on the Snake River below. When the area was designated in 1975, roads for reaching the canyon rim and the river were not in good condition. One of the key objectives of the area plan was to improve the roads to these areas. The plan specified projects to reconstruct several roads, including one to a viewpoint on the canyon's western rim and two to boat launch areas on the river.

Projects to improve these three roads were identified in the area plan that was approved in 1981. Appeals by various interest groups delayed implementation of the plan until 1984, and according to a Forest Service official, funding limitations then delayed work on any of the three roads until 1988. During the 13-year period since the area's designation, driving access to these areas has been restricted to those visitors willing to risk travel on extremely rough roads. More specifically:

- The road to the viewpoint at the canyon rim is a 24-mile dirt and gravel road that requires about a 3-hour trip each way because of its rough condition. The Forest Service does not recommend the road for automobiles with low clearance or automobiles pulling trailers. In wet weather, the Forest Service requires vehicles using the road to have either tire chains or 4-wheel drive. In 1988, the Forest Service received about

$450,000 to reconstruct about 6 miles of the road. The remaining 18 miles was scheduled for completion in 1989, but because of funding shortfalls, completion is now planned for 1990, funding permitting.

- The remaining two roads provide driving access for visitors who want to tow their boats to boat launches on the river. However, because of the rough conditions of these roads, Forest Service officials do not recommend that vehicles pulling boat trailers use them. According to an area official, reconstruction of one of the roads is planned to start in 1990 and the other in 1991.

The Forest Service has recognized that facility development at Hells Canyon has not occurred as planned. For example, in a 1985 internal assessment of the area, the Forest Service noted that with regard to recreation development and road access, "there is a building groundswell of opinion that the Forest Service has not lived up to the promises of the National Recreation Area . . . ."

Sawtooth National Recreation Area

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area, designated in 1972, is located in Idaho and is a popular area for camping. When the area was designated, it had about 540 campsites. One of the goals listed in the area plan, approved in 1975, called for building 738 new campsites by 1995. The additional campsites were proposed to accommodate projected increases in visitors over a 20-year period and to allow 25 percent of the existing campsites to be closed each season so that the impact of heavy use could be minimized. According to Forest Service officials, as of August 1988 only 75 of the 728 new campsites had been built, and the visitor trend still supports the need for the additional 663 campsites.

The area manager told us that some damage to the area has occurred because the additional sites have not been built. For example, at several locations where existing campsites have been insufficient to handle demand on summer weekends, campers who are turned away from the developed areas move their recreation vehicles to undeveloped areas. The result has been damage to meadows and riverbanks, which results in soil erosion and unsightly conditions. Also, according to the manager, campers at these undeveloped areas have sometimes dumped wastewater into the river. The manager stated that both the erosion and the dumping contribute to degrading habitat for salmon and other fisheries that are specifically to be protected under the terms of the designating legislation. A 1987 Forest Service internal assessment of the area reported that "uncontrolled campground overflow to dispersed areas on

the Sawtooth NRA [National Recreation Area] is causing resource and visual damage, especially along the Salmon River."

Pettit Lake is another example of an area where campsites are inadequate at Sawtooth. This area was scheduled for a campground with 40 sites in 1975 to accommodate increasing numbers of visitors. An area official explained that because the campground has not been built, an area originally designated for day use only has been converted to an overnight campground, with barriers installed to keep campers from camping too close to the lake. However, we observed that the barriers had been removed. As a result, recreation vehicles were occupying the shoreline, limiting day-use access and damaging shoreline vegetation.

Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area

The Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, established in 1972, is located on a scenic U.S. highway along the Oregon coast. The recreation area is 41 miles long and contains sand dunes ranging from small dunes with crests of 6 to 8 feet to large dunes with heights to 300 feet and lengths to 5,000 feet. The area had about 1.4 million recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest data available). The Forest Service estimated that nearly one-third of the visitors were off-road vehicle users. The area plan, approved in 1979, called for construction of a broad range of information and interpretive facilities to inform the visiting public about the Dunes environment and the recreation opportunities there. The plan called for construction of a visitor center, information stations at the north and south ends of the area, and two dune overlooks, but did not include cost estimates for these facilities. During our visit, we found that many of these projects had not been implemented. The Forest Service Area headquarters office, located approximately at the midpoint of the 41-mile length of the area, was the only place where information brochures and maps were available. As a result, visitors entering the area from the north or the south must travel about 20 miles to obtain information about the dunes. Although a few key roadside locations had informative pictorial signs (the result of a 3-year, $1.15 million sign project completed in 1988), we found other significant features and access points unmarked.

As of March 1989, area officials said that only one of the information and interpretive facility projects, an overlook costing about $350,000, was completed. The second overlook, which was originally scheduled for completion in 1983, is currently planned for construction in 1994. The plan for the area no longer calls for the visitor center or information

centers. According to an area official, inadequate funding was a primary reason for these projects being dropped.

A Forest Service internal review of the area conducted in 1982 found the development of both information and interpretive facilities to be inadequate. The review noted that the plan, which specified a visitor center and two information stations, had been developed with public involvenent but that the decision to drop these projects had been made unilaterally by the Forest Service. The review stated that "organizational credibility is lost when plans that go through the public involvement process are abandoned or changed without reinvolving the public." We were told that, except for the overlook and some new roadside signs, little has changed since 1982.

Limited Development Planned for Most Areas Designated During the 1980s

Unlike the areas designated in the 1960s and 1970s, 10 of the 12 plans for the areas designated in the 1980s do not call for a major investment in new recreation facilities. For the most part, the legislation calls for the continuation of existing recreation activities and the preservation of the natural resources, and plans for these areas project limited development. For example, the Mount Baker National Recreation Area in Washington State, established in 1984, is an 8,600-acre area used extensively for snowmobiling. The main planned developments in recreational facilities are restrooms, signs, and improved trails. Forest Service personnel estimate the total cost of these planned improvements at $512,000. Another example, is Admiralty Island National Monument/Wilderness in Alaska. Established in 1980, it is the second-largest special recreation area with 969,600 acres. Only about $100,000 is planned for facility projects, including a bear observatory and three trails.

There are two exceptions to this general trend—Mount St. Helens and Columbia River Gorge. At Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, Forest Service officials estimated that about $66 million would be needed for projects such as a visitor center, major road reconstruction, hiking trails, and interpretive sites. As of April 1989, about $35 million was reported spent or obligated for these projects. At Columbia River Gorge, the Congress has authorized about $29 million for recreation facility development, including a visitor center and a conference center. The Forest Service is currently studying the recreation potential of the area before developing a facility and management plan. A completed plan is anticipated by fiscal year 1990.

Most Areas Not Receiving Showcase Management

We found that visitor programs and services (such as educational programs and visitor information services) at most special recreation areas—regardless of when the areas were established—generally fell short of the showcase level directed by Forest Service policy. Forest Service internal reviews at some areas have noted that developed site facilities were generally not managed at expected showcase levels and that interpretive services were below the level anticipated in the area plan. We asked the managers of the 20 special recreation areas to describe the adequacy of the condition of facilities and level of service for programs. As table 2.2 shows, managers of 15 areas reported that they believed their interpretive services were inadequate to meet the needs of the visitors or that they had lowered maintenance or cleanup levels between fiscal years 1984 and 1988.

Table 2.2: Area Officials' Responses to Questions on the Adequacy of Interpretive Services and Maintenance Levels

Area	Inadequate interpretive services (yes/no)	Lowered maintenance or or cleanup levels (yes/no)
Pre-1980 areas		
Arapaho	Yes	Yes
Flaming Gorge	Yes	Yes
Hells Canyon	Yes	Yes
Mt. Rogers	Yes	Yes
Oregon Dunes	Yes	Yes
Sawtooth	Yes	Yes
Spruce Knob Seneca Rocks	No	No
Shasta Trinity	Yes	Yes
Post-1980 areas		
Admiralty Island	Yes	Yes
Allegheny	No	Yes
Columbia River Gorge	No response	No response
Misty Fiords	Yes	No
Mono Basin	Yes	No
Mount Baker	Yes	Yes
Mount St. Helens	No	Yes
North Cascade	Yes	No
Oregon Cascade	No	No
Pine Ridge	No	No
Rattlesnake	No	Yes
White Rocks	No	No

Officials at 12 of the 20 areas indicated that inadequate funding or staffing was the cause for areas' having lower maintenance or cleanup

levels, and officials at 9 of the 20 said that inadequate funding contributed to the inadequate interpretive service levels reported.

Visitor Services Are Often Inadequate

According to Forest Service policy, special recreation areas should provide interpretive services to enhance visitors' understanding and appreciation of the areas' special features, and these services should be maintained at showcase levels. These services include providing guided nature walks to special features, operating interpretive and information sites where visitors can obtain explanations of natural and historic events and directions to popular features, and conducting educational programs to help visitors understand and follow forest practices. While the policy does not provide details on what constitutes showcase levels, many of the area officials we talked to stated that information and interpretive services were often inadequate and did not approach showcase levels.

Officials of 12 of the 20 areas stated that information or interpretive services were inadequate. Examples provided by Forest Service personnel include the following:

- At Sawtooth, eight rangers patrolled 247 miles of wilderness trail during 1980, providing information and assistance to visitors. Because of staffing cutbacks, only one ranger was available to provide such services in 1988, and the area staff has severely curtailed evening and weekend walks and talks at campground amphitheaters and the visitor centers.
- At Flaming Gorge, Forest Service interpretive staff declined from as many as 12 in 1970 to one in 1989. As a result, weekend interpretive programs for visitors that were held at campgrounds during the May-through-September visitor season have been eliminated since 1983. In addition, a Forest Service official told us that visitors receive limited information about boating safety and regulations, environmental issues affecting the area, or the geology, cultures, and history that make the area unique. Furthermore, all four Forest Service boats used for safety and information patrols, facility maintenance, and rescue operations on the 91-mile-long reservoir were taken out of service in the mid-1980s because of funding shortfalls. In 1988, the Forest Service entered into a partnership with a local county government to jointly maintain and operate one boat to patrol the reservoir. An area official told us, however, that one boat is not sufficient to meet the area's water recreation management responsibilities and that at least five boats are needed to conduct adequate safety and information patrols.

- Shasta-Trinity had an interpretation services program that included campfire theatre programs and guided nature hikes prior to 1979. An area official said that three full-time and five seasonal staff were available for this function then. He added that since 1980, staffing for this function has been reduced to the point where only one of his staff has some interpretation duties. As a result, according to the official, these services have been virtually nonexistent for the past 10 years.

The Forest Service has acknowledged that except in a few select locations, interpretation has been all but eliminated because of funding priorities. According to one official, the first casualty of reduced budgets is interpretive services, which are eliminated in favor of maintaining facilities. Officials at five of the nine areas we visited indicated that increasing funding levels for interpretive service would be essential to achieve the showcase management objectives established for these areas in Forest Service policy.

Maintenance Levels Reduced

Officials of 12 of the 20 areas reported to us that maintenance or cleanup levels had been lowered between 1983 and 1988. At some areas, this meant postponing needed facility repairs until they become critical. Officials at two of the older areas stated that more money and staff had been available for maintenance a decade ago, and several officials said their areas had declined in terms of overall condition since being established as special recreation areas.[2] Thus, many areas we visited were not being maintained at showcase levels. The following are examples of conditions reported:

- At Arapaho, the staff reported that all maintenance except for health and safety items had been postponed or eliminated since the early 1980s. As a result, nearly two-thirds of the area's 345 developed overnight camping sites have not been adequately maintained. According to an area official, because of this insufficient maintenance, many of these sites are substandard and visitors must put up with eroded and uneven camping pads, broken or missing fire rings, unpainted structures, and old, leaking toilets.
- At Flaming Gorge, the staff reported that necessary preventive maintenance work on complex sewage and water systems had not been done. According to an area official, five full-time people would be required to

[2]Because information on operations and maintenance funding at the area level had been discarded or sent to storage for the years before 1986, we were not able to determine the historical pattern of funding for operations and maintenance.

provide proper maintenance to clean pipes and replace older pumps and broken pipes. He said that in 1988 he did not have the resources to assign anyone full-time responsibility for maintaining these systems; consequently, the systems were vulnerable to breakdowns during peak summer weekends. An area official reported that a few breakdowns have occurred that required closing a campground. In fiscal year 1989, funding permitted dedicating three full-time staff to maintaining these systems.

- At Shasta-Trinity, maintenance at the primary swimming beaches for visitors to the area was reported deferred for 15 years. As a result, nearly all the sand on the beaches has eroded, leaving a strand of rocks, mud, and weeds at the water's edge. According to an area official, these beaches are no longer desirable places to swim.

Of the 12 areas reporting reductions in maintenance and cleanup levels, 7 were established before 1980.[3] These older areas are more vulnerable to the effects of deferred maintenance because they generally have older facilities to maintain. However, limited maintenance funds can also be a concern at newer facilities. For example, an official at Mount St. Helens, one of the newer areas, expressed concern about the impact of future deferred maintenance. He reported that after committing nearly $35 million for new facilities over the past several years, funding has not increased correspondingly to meet new operation and maintenance demands. He estimated that a 20- to 25-percent increase would be needed over the current recreation funding budget of $850,000 to bring the area's maintenance up to full Forest Service standards. He said that if the rate of maintenance funding does not increase, the new facilities would deteriorate at a faster rate than would be expected if adequate routine maintenance were performed. We have reported that the continued deferral of maintenance, carries the potential for continuing deterioration to the point where some assets will be lost permanently.[4]

[3]The only area designated before 1980 that did not report lower maintenance and cleanup was Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks. The area manager considered facility conditions generally good, largely because the facilities were recently reconstructed after a 1985 flood. He said that the Congress appropriated money for the reconstruction as special line items in the Forest Service budget.

[4]See Parks and Recreation: Park Service Managers Report Shortfalls in Maintenance Funding (GAO/RCED-88-91BR, Mar. 21, 1988).

Status of Planned Objectives Not Adequately Monitored and Reported

An effective monitoring and information-reporting system on the status of the special recreation areas does not exist. As a result, information on progress made, deferments, and future resource needs for the special recreation areas has generally not been developed and reported.

To determine the progress made at special recreation areas compared with planned objectives, we reviewed Forest Service budget submissions to the Congress and found that such information was not included in the submissions. We also asked officials at Forest Service headquarters for these data and found that they did not have this information. Consequently, we queried officials at the individual special recreation areas for this information.

We found that the monitoring and evaluation of recreation development and progress varied greatly among the areas. For example, while officials at 10 of the 20 areas provided us a list showing delays in completing projects contained in the area plans, some of these lists did not include all the projects proposed in the area plan or did not include the current status of all projects. As a result, we were unable to directly quantify the exact number of projects delayed or the average length of the delays. In addition, officials at most of the areas we visited were unable to provide us with documentation detailing planned, actual, and scheduled project completion. For example, at one of the areas, we were told that there was no written documentation reporting the status of past construction and reconstruction projects included in the area plan.

With regard to visitor services and facility maintenance, Forest Service internal evaluations of some areas have noted problems accompanying lower-than-planned levels of visitor services and facilities maintenance. For example, a 1984 analysis of special recreation areas in the Pacific Northwest stated, "[Our] credibility with the public gets stretched farther each year as we fail to meet our publicly-proclaimed commitments." A 1987 management review focusing on Mount St. Helens stated that "the Forest Service image could be tarnished if facilities are allowed to deteriorate and public services are significantly reduced." Also in 1987, a report on Flaming Gorge and Sawtooth concluded that "capital investments are deteriorating and many improvements will soon reach a point where public health and safety will be compromised. This could result in the need to close some facilities." However, these internal evaluations are not prepared on a regular basis and do not always include an examination of all planned goals and objectives.

We did find one area—Mount St. Helens—where officials annually updated, reported progress and accomplishments, and prepared a 5-year budget for achieving planned development and operation objectives. According to officials at the Forest Service office responsible for Mount St. Helens, the annual published updates prepared for this area have contributed to keeping the planned goals and objectives stated in the area plan on target. The area manager told us that the report serves as a combination implementation plan, accomplishment report, and documentation to support project needs. The detailed information contained in the reports provides an implementation schedule with associated cost estimates for review by Forest Service, local, and congressional interests.

Development, Operations, and Maintenance Shortfalls Linked to Funding Limitations

According to special recreation area officials, funding and staffing shortfalls were often the cause of the delays in facility development, the inadequacy of visitor information services, and lower maintenance and cleanup levels discussed in the previous chapter. Funding decreases (expressed in constant 1989 dollars) for special recreation areas mirrored general decreases in Forest Service recreation funding between 1980 and 1986. Funding for Forest Service-wide recreation during fiscal years 1987-89 has been increased, but as of fiscal year 1989 had not been restored to the fiscal year 1980 level. Officials at six of the nine special recreation areas we visited told us that they believed the current increased funding levels would allow them to complete planned development projects within 10 years, but officials at all nine areas said the increased funding levels were still insufficient to meet operations and maintenance needs.

The Forest Service has recently initiated efforts to offset its anticipated recreation funding shortfall. In April 1988, it issued a National Recreation Strategy, which calls for stretching available federal dollars through greater use of volunteers and through seeking out public and private groups to share the expense of developing, repairing, and operating facilities. Although these efforts may provide some help, we believe it is questionable whether they will provide sufficient additional resources to develop planned facilities and achieve a showcase level of operations at the special recreation areas.

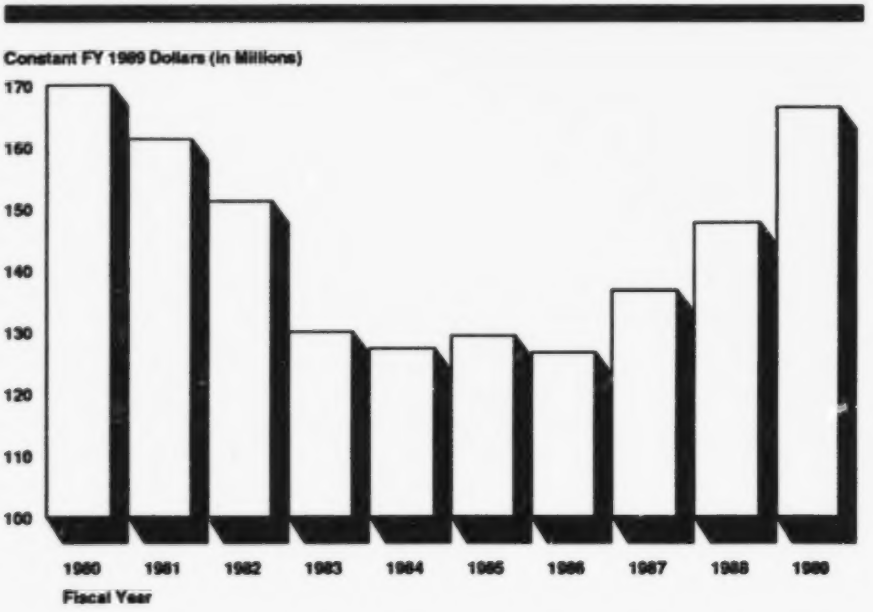
Funding for Forest Service-Wide Recreation Fell Substantially During the Early 1980s

Special recreation area managers told us that shortfalls in funding and staffing were often the reason for the delays in projects, the inadequacy of visitor information services, and the lower levels of cleanup and maintenance. Specifically, officials at 8 of the 10 areas where facility developments had been delayed or dropped cited funding or staffing shortfalls as the reason. At all 15 areas where services and/or maintenance levels had been reduced, officials cited funding or staffing as the cause. However, the Forest Service was unable to provide us with annual recreation funding allocated to these areas for fiscal years 1980 through 1985. As a result, we could not develop quantifiable trend data on funding levels for these areas for the 10-year period ending September 1989. As a surrogate, we used Service-wide recreation funding allocations to determine the direction of funding during that period.

During fiscal years 1980 through 1986, the Forest Service experienced a major reduction in the purchasing power of its recreation dollars. Figure 3.1 shows the level of Service-wide funding for recreation during fiscal

years 1980-89. Funding is expressed in terms of constant 1989 dollars, which means that funding levels for all years shown in the figure have been adjusted to the purchasing power of the dollar in fiscal year 1989. As the figure shows, the amounts available dropped from fiscal year 1980 to fiscal year 1986. In fiscal year 1980, recreation funding had a constant dollar value of $170 million. By fiscal year 1986, the value for recreation funding had dropped to $126.6 million, a reduction of about 26 percent. However, funding was increased in each of fiscal years 1987-89.

Figure 3.1: Forest Service-Wide Trend for Recreation Funding, Fiscal Years 1980-89



In July 1986, the Forest Service reported that in recent years financial and work force limitations had reduced the agency's capability to manage all recreation use activities at acceptable levels Service-wide. In its 1985 Recommended Renewable Resources Program Update,[1] the Forest Service reported:

[1]The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resource Act of 1974, as amended, directs the Secretary of Agriculture to periodically assess the status of the nation's forest and range resources and recommend a program for their management and use. The 1985 program update is the third update under this legislation.

"Since 1978, some maintenance and services have been deferred while operation needs were being addressed. Accumulation of deferred maintenance is now the focus for some of the highest priority work because of the potential investment loss and rapidly increasing need for major site and facility restorations."

The update stated that the percentage of Service-wide recreation use management that meets full Forest Service standards for quality recreation had decreased from 74 percent in 1978 to 27 percent in 1985. It concluded that financial and work force limitations reduced the agency's capability to manage recreation at acceptable levels and "results directly in facility deterioration and closure."

The deferred maintenance and facility deterioration caused by the shortfall in funding has contributed significantly to a growing Service-wide backlog of recreation repair and reconstruction projects. The Forest Service reported that the Service-wide backlog of recreation facilities in need of repair and reconstruction increased from a 1978 total of about $134 million to nearly $300 million by 1986. The Forest Service reported that $52 million of this amount was directly related to high-priority projects to reduce health and safety hazards to the public.

Special Recreation Areas Also Affected by Declining Budget

During fiscal years 1980-86, the Forest Service generally did not single out special recreation areas for priority funding. Most of the special recreation area managers we talked to stated that they had to compete with other forest areas on a near-equal footing for limited resources to implement their plans. These managers reported that this, combined with Service-wide budget reductions, has resulted in a decline in both facility development and operations funding similar to that experienced Service-wide. Because information on operations and maintenance funding by area had, in most cases, been discarded or sent to storage for the years before 1986, we were not able to determine the historical funding pattern.

Recent Funding Increases Inadequate to Address Backlog

Beginning in fiscal year 1987, Service-wide funding for recreation increased, as figure 3.1 shows. Expressed in constant dollars, fiscal year 1989 funding was about 30 percent greater than the fiscal year 1986 level. According to the Forest Service, however, this Service-wide increase in recreation funding has not been sufficient to eliminate construction backlogs or bring maintenance up to levels described in forest plans. In a 1989 report, the Forest Service compared planned recreation needs reported in the forest plans to initial funding allocations for fiscal

year 1989. Our analysis of final fiscal year 1989 funding allocations showed that 48 percent of the $24 million in recreation construction projects listed in forest plans for fiscal year 1989 would be funded and that about 72 percent of the $142 million in recreation operation and maintenance needs called for in forest plans would be met.

Since fiscal year 1986, funding for special recreation areas has increased faster than the Service-wide rate. For example, recreation funding in constant 1989 dollars for these areas has increased about 170 percent from about $6.3 million in fiscal year 1986 to about $17 million in fiscal year 1989. Comparatively, funding for Forest Service recreation overall has increased by about 30 percent, from about $127 million to about $166 million during the same period.

Detailed information on the resources needed to develop, operate, and maintain each of the special recreation areas is not readily available. Nevertheless, officials at six of the nine areas we visited said they believed that if the current higher funding levels continue, all facility development projects listed in their area plans could be completed within the next 10 years. However, most of the officials at the nine areas we visited doubted that these funding levels would be sustained. In addition, officials at all nine areas we visited told us that the increased funding available for fiscal year 1989 for recreation use activities was still insufficient to meet Forest Service standards, let alone the undefined but higher showcase standard.

Forest Service Initiatives to Offset Funding Shortfalls

The Forest Service has recently initiated efforts to offset its funding shortfalls for recreation. In April 1988, it issued the National Recreation Strategy, which gives special attention to showcasing recreation at special recreation areas. The strategy calls for stretching available federal dollars through greater use of volunteers and through seeking out public and private groups to share the expense of developing, repairing, and operating facilities. Although these efforts may provide some help in developing and operating the areas, we believe that, on the basis of concerns identified by the Forest Service, they may not provide sufficient help to achieve the areas' planned levels of facility development or a showcase level of operations.

National Recreation Strategy

The National Recreation Strategy has a goal of meeting recreation needs without depending solely on the Forest Service budget. The strategy encourages all Forest Service managers to leverage federal dollars

through the use of volunteers and partnerships to help operate and maintain facilities and support recreation projects. The strategy applies to all national forests; however, it specifically calls for recognizing the value of special recreation areas within the forests.

The new recreation strategy has not been in place long enough to determine the extent to which it will enhance the development and operation of special recreation areas. However, two internal Forest Service analyses identified several concerns brought up by Forest Service employees that may limit the strategy's effectiveness: (1) limitations in the ability of the current "busy" Forest Service work force to accomplish additional responsibilities, (2) limitations on the use of volunteers, and (3) an absence of guidelines on establishing and implementing partnership agreements.

With regard to the first concern, Forest Service employees said that the "workbench is full" and that they do not have extra time to take on new tasks, such as developing partnership skills and strategies and implementing volunteer programs. Forest Service officials also noted that many employees are so pressed by day-to-day tasks and existing priorities that they do not have sufficient time to adequately plan and implement new programs.

With regard to the second concern, the Forest Service employees noted that although individual volunteers contribute significantly to the development, operation, and maintenance of recreation facilities, volunteers are not free labor. Recruiting, training, and supervising volunteers require a considerable investment of time and money, with no assurance that volunteers will remain committed and available.

Finally, the Forest Service chief and his staff discussed the need for partnership guidelines to support managers' efforts to increase the numbers and kinds of partnerships. However, as of May 1989, guidelines for managing partnerships had not been finalized.

Recreation Cost Share Program

To supplement the new strategy, the Forest Service implemented the Recreation Challenge Cost Share Program. To compete for funds under this program, forest managers must secure matching contributions from private individuals, public agencies, or other sources. In fiscal year 1988, the Congress appropriated $500,000 to implement the program, which generated about $900,000 in pledged contributions, according to

the Forest Service. In fiscal year 1989, the Congress increased the program's appropriation to $3 million.

Forest Service guidelines call for giving special consideration to congressionally designated areas within the forests—including the 20 special recreation areas—when making decisions about which projects to fund under the Recreation Challenge Cost Share Program. For fiscal year 1988, 31 projects were selected Service-wide. Forest Service officials told us that five of these projects were for special recreation areas. These five projects received $80,300 in Forest Service funding, which generated $88,000 in pledges from partners, as shown in table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Forest Service Cost Share Projects Funded in Fiscal Year 1988 at Special Recreation Areas Reviewed by GAO

Area name	Project description	Federal share	Nonfederal pledges
Arapaho	Park with handicapped access	$27,000	$27,000
Mt. Rogers	Handicapped access trail	25,000	25,000
White Rocks	Appalachian Trail shelters	20,000	20,000
Sawtooth	Historic ranger station restoration	6,000	7,000
Sawtooth	Horse-unloading facility	2,300	9,000
Total		**$80,300**	**$88,000**

The $168,300 in federal and nonfederal funds generated by the Recreation Challenge Cost Share Program for special recreation areas represents about 2 percent of the $8.8 million total fiscal year 1988 recreation use and recreation construction funding reported available for all special recreation areas.

Initiatives Not Likely to Provide Sufficient Additional Resources

The increased use of volunteers, partnerships, and the cost share program provides a step toward closing the gap between current and planned recreation facility development and showcase operations at these areas. However, it remains to be seen just how much the initiatives will add, since many areas already use volunteers and partnerships. At many of the sites we visited, officials depend on volunteers and partners to oversee campground activities, operate visitor information centers and cultural sites, assist in building trails and other facilities, and help restore historic buildings. While some officials were optimistic about increasing the level of participation, Forest Service officials' concerns regarding using volunteers and partnerships are significant enough to suggest that these programs are not likely to fulfill all the efforts needed to bring the areas up to the showcase levels called for in Forest Service policy.

Chapter 4

Conclusions and Recommendation

Forest Service policy calls for special recreation areas to be managed as showcases for National Forest programs, services, and facilities. Specific development and management objectives for these areas are contained in individual plans the Forest Service develops for each area. We found that many of the special recreation areas fall short of expectations established for them in Forest Service policy and individual area plans both in the extent to which facilities have been developed and in the levels at which they are operated and maintained. For example, officials at 10 of the 20 areas we reviewed reported delaying or dropping projects contained in the area plans, and officials at 15 of the 20 areas reported that visitor services were inadequate and/or that maintenance levels had been lowered. Special recreation area officials told us that funding and staffing shortfalls were often the cause of delayed or dropped facility development, inadequate interpretive services, and lowered maintenance or cleanup levels.

The reported funding shortfalls at special recreation areas correspond to funding shortfalls in the Forest Service recreation budgets in the 1980s. Between fiscal years 1980 and 1986, the purchasing power of the Forest Service budget for recreation declined about 26 percent. Although the Forest Service has had increases in recreation funding for the last 3 years, special recreation area officials told us that they believed these levels are still insufficient to achieve the showcase levels called for in Forest Service policy for these areas.

The Forest Service has developed initiatives to encourage public contributions of time and dollars, which could help offset these shortfalls. Although these initiatives will doubtless provide some help, preliminary indications are that there are limitations on the amount of these resources and the Forest Service's ability to use them. It is unlikely that in themselves the additional resources available to the Forest Service through its initiatives will bridge the gap to achieve full showcase levels of development and operations for the special recreation areas.

Detailed information on the amount of resources that would be needed to develop, operate, and maintain these areas up to the levels called for in Forest Service policy and the individual area plans is not readily available. In addition, information on progress made, deferments, and future needs has generally not been developed. Without such data, neither the Forest Service nor the Congress has the detailed information needed to make decisions on appropriate levels of funding and time frames for meeting the goals established for these areas. We did find one area—Mount St. Helens—where officials tracked, updated, and

reported progress and accomplishments annually in a 5-year outlook for achieving objectives in the area plan. Similar information for all the special recreation areas would assist the Forest Service and the Congress in making decisions on funding levels and time frames for meeting the objectives established for these areas.

We recognize that in times of tight budgetary constraints all funding needs and requests may not be realized and that delays for planned projects may be expected. However, appropriate levels of funding and time frames for meeting congressional and public expectations for these areas can better be decided if both the Forest Service management and the Congress have sufficient information to make appropriate choices and trade-offs. That information is not available for Forest Service management purposes or congressional review. Development and disclosure of such information is needed for the Congress and the Forest Service to make informed decisions on the benefits and consequences of various options and alternatives for these special recreation areas.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Secretary of Agriculture direct the Chief of the Forest Service to develop information on and periodically report the status of development, operations, and maintenance at each special recreation area to the Congress. Such information should, as a minimum, include (1) aspects of each area's plan that have been completed, (2) aspects of the plan that have yet to be completed, (3) the proposed time frame and the estimated costs associated with completing the work necessary to fulfill the plan, and (4) an assessment of the resources needed to operate and maintain these areas at showcase levels. Forest Service headquarters officials told us that they generally agreed with this recommendation.

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Funding Levels for Special Recreation Areas

	Funding level (actual dollars)			
Activity	**FY 1986**	**FY 1987**	**FY 1988**	**FY 1989**
Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area: Established September 1965				
Recreation use	$104,000	$120,000	$165,000	$114,800
Recreation construction	126,400	822,000	1,475,000	705,900
Other[1]	8,700	215,400	102,000	740,700
Total	**$239,100**	**$1,157,400**	**$1,742,000**	**$1,561,400**
Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area: Established November 1965				
Recreation use	$635,090	$1,059,930	$1,094,000	$887,500
Recreation construction	15,000	420,950	0	42,000
Other[3]	851,730	934,890	1,110,000	1,098,584
Total	**$1,501,820**	**$2,415,770**	**$2,204,000**	**$2,028,084**
Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area: Established May 1966				
Recreation use	$106,780	$138,770	$130,860	$147,531
Recreation construction	0	133,500	0	889,000
Other[3]	44,720	37,300	20,460	83,331
Total	**$151,500**	**$309,570**	**$151,320**	**$1,119,862**
Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area: Established October 1968				
Recreation use	$567,690	$745,870	$773,670	$982,929
Recreation construction	30,000	112,000	425,000	538,000
Other[3]	20,920	83,500	7,810	4,000
Total	**$618,610**	**$941,370**	**$1,206,480**	**$1,524,929**
Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area: Established March 1972				
Recreation use	$400,000	$540,000	$600,000	$853,000
Recreation construction	64,000	134,000	200,000	254,000
Other[3]	36,000	246,000	320,000	160,000
Total	**$500,000**	**$920,000**	**$1,120,000**	**$1,267,000**
Sawtooth National Recreation Area: Established August 1972				
Recreation use	$561,600	$516,800	$408,800	$560,000
Recreation construction	0	69,000	425,000	235,000
Other[3]	4,300	107,700	85,000	978,000
Total	**$565,900**	**$693,500**	**$918,800**	**$1,773,000**
Hells Canyon National Recreation Area: Established December 1975				
Recreation use	$148,000	$198,000	$210,000	$398,000
Recreation construction	25,000	35,000	250,000	10,000
Other[3]	177,000	267,000	560,000	482,000
Total	**$350,000**	**$500,000**	**$1,020,000**	**$890,000**

(continued)

Activity	Funding level (actual dollars) FY 1986	FY 1987	FY 1988	FY 1989
Arapaho National Recreation Area: Established October 1978				
Recreation use	$193,000	$238,000	$225,000	$121,000
Recreation construction	19,500	35,200	60,000	271,000
Other[a]	6,650	34,800	15,700	8,000
Total	**$219,150**	**$308,000**	**$300,700**	**$400,000**
Rattlesnake National Recreation Area: Established October 1980				
Recreation use	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000	$12,000
Recreation construction	0	70,000	0	0
Other[a]	5,000	25,000	10,000	8,000
Total	**$15,000**	**$105,000**	**$20,000**	**$20,000**
Admiralty Island National Monument: Established December 1980				
Recreation use	$52,430	$45,130	$50,250	$256,500[b]
Recreation construction	0	0	0	15,000
Other[a]	224,380	265,290	327,140	203,428
Total	**$276,810**	**$310,420**	**$377,390**	**$474,928**
Misty Fiords National Monument: Established December 1980				
Recreation use	$35,900	$20,500	$11,900	$164,500[b]
Recreation construction	15,000	0	0	0
Other[a]	447,200	488,900	369,000	424,400
Total	**$498,1**	**$509,4**	**$380,9**	**$588,900**
Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument: Established August 1982				
Recreation use	$700,000	$800,000	$850,000	$850,000
Recreation construction	1,600,000	850,000	766,000	3,400,000
Other[a]	530,000	2,990,000	944,000	6,428,000
Total	**$2,830,000**	**$4,640,000**	**$2,560,000**	**$10,678,000**
White Rocks National Recreation Area: Established June 1984				
Recreation use	$5,000	$5,000	$5,000	$15,000
Recreation construction	18,600	40,000	3,000	0
Other[a]	29,600	4,000	5,500	12,500
Total	**$53,200**	**$49,000**	**$13,500**	**$27,500**

(continued)

Activity	Funding level (actual dollars) FY 1986	FY 1987	FY 1988	FY 1989
Oregon Cascades National Management Emphasis Area: Established June 1984				
Recreation use	$7,600	$7,800	$11,200	$27,000
Recreation construction	0	0	8,000	17,600
Other[a]	0	0	0	21,500
Total	**$7,600**	**$7,800**	**$19,200**	**$66,100**
Mt. Baker National Recreation Area: Established July 1984				
Recreation use	$7,000	$12,000	$12,000	$15,000
Recreation construction	0	10,000	10,000	0
Other[a]	23,000	68,000	78,000	16,000
Total	**$30,000**	**$90,000**	**$100,000**	**$31,000**
North Cascades National Scenic Area: Established July 1984				
Recreation use	$30,000	$32,000	$35,000	$40,000
Recreation construction	23,000	0	2,000	6,400
Other[a]	16,000	16,000	18,000	20,000
Total	**$69,000**	**$48,000**	**$55,000**	**$66,400**
Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area: Established September 1984				
Recreation use	$63,930	$81,900	$78,500	$78,700
Recreation construction	15,900	18,500	13,200	4,120,000
Other[a]	120,920	108,900	102,500	234,000
Total	**$200,750**	**$209,300**	**$194,200**	**$4,432,700**
Allegheny National Recreation Area: Established October 1984				
Recreation use	$84,500	$82,000	$89,000	$82,000
Recreation construction	0	0	29,000	0
Other[a]	1,500	1,200	1,000	5,500
Total	**$86,000**	**$83,000**	**$119,000**	**$87,500**
Pine Ridge National Recreation Area: Established October 1986				
Recreation use		$800	$1,000	$9,065
Recreation construction		0	0	0
Other[a]		5,700	3,800	4,300
Total		**$6,500**	**$4,800**	**$13,365**
Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area: Established November 1986				
Recreation use	$45,000	$315,000	$426,000	$794,000
Recreation construction	0	0	0	50,000
Other[a]	5,000	35,000	164,000	0
Total	**$50,000**	**$350,000**	**$590,000**	**$844,000**

(continued)

Activity	Funding level (actual dollars) FY 1986	FY 1987	FY 1988	FY 1989
Total Allocation For Areas Listed Above				
Recreation use	$3,757,520	$4,969,500	$5,187,180	$6,408,525
Recreation construction	1,952,400	2,750,150	3,666,200	10,553,900
Subtotal for recreation	$5,709,920	$7,719,650	$8,853,380	$16,962,425
Other[a]	2,552,620	5,934,580	4,243,910	10,932,243
Total for recreation and other	**$8,262,540**	**$13,654,230**	**$13,097,290**	**$27,894,668**

[a]The "other" budget activity reported here includes funding for other recreation-related activities associated with these areas, including trail maintenance, trail construction, and wilderness management, where applicable.

[b]Includes wilderness management funding that was included in the "other" funding activity reported in previous fiscal years.

Synopsis of Special Recreation Areas

Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area

Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area was established in September 1965. Located in northeastern West Virginia near the Virginia border, the 100,000-acre area is about 175 miles from Richmond, Virginia. Featuring the highest mountain in West Virginia, along with spectacular rock formations, the area is considered to be one of the most challenging rock-climbing destinations in the East. Other attractions include fishing, hunting, and white-water canoeing. According to an area official, state and federal highways into the area are narrow, two-laned roads. He also stated that a planned major four-lane highway was never completed. Recreation visits have lagged far behind original projections. The 1969 management plan for the area estimated that recreation visitor days would grow from 110,000 in 1967 to 2.5 million by 1980 and 5 million by 2000. Forest Service officials reported that recreation visitor days at the area in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available) totaled 150,000.

The legislation establishing the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks area called for the Secretary of Agriculture to provide for public outdoor recreation; conservation of the scenic, scientific, and historic values of the area; and management of natural resources in a manner compatible with the purpose of the recreation area. The law requires the Secretary of Agriculture to institute an accelerated program of developing facilities for outdoor recreation. The 1969 area plan called for an aggressive program of campground, picnic, road, trail, and related facility construction. According to area officials, only a small portion of planned facility development has occurred for a variety of reasons, including (1) public opposition to development, (2) decisions not to build two scenic drives through the area, and (3) problems with the limestone strata in the area, which precluded lake development. Forest Service officials said they formulated a new forest plan in 1986 that shifted the emphasis for the special recreation area from the old concept of extensive development to one of limited recreation development.

Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area

Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area is located in northern California approximately 200 miles north of San Francisco. The area was established in November 1965 to recognize the recreation opportunities provided by reservoirs created by the Bureau of Reclamation's Central Valley Project. The 212,000 acres of the Shasta and Trinity units are administered by the Forest Service, while the National Park Service administers the Whiskeytown unit, which includes Whiskeytown Lake. Interstate 5 runs through the Shasta unit, and a state highway allows access to the Trinity unit.

The major features of the Shasta and Trinity units are the lakes—Lake Shasta, with a 370-mile shoreline offering wooded flats, steep rocky hillsides, creeks, and thousands of acres of mountainous country surrounding the lake, and Clair Engle Lake and Lewiston Lake on the Trinity unit, with 145-mile and 15-mile shorelines, respectively. Both units offer boating, water skiing, swimming, fishing, camping, picnicking, hiking, and hunting. Both Shasta and Clair Engle Lakes have outstanding houseboating opportunities. Area officials report approximately 3 million recreation visitor days annually.

The designating legislation directs that the area provide for (1) public outdoor recreation benefits; (2) conservation of scenic, scientific, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment; and (3) management utilization and disposal of renewable natural resources that are compatible with and do not significantly impair public recreation and the conservation of scenic, scientific, historic, or other values contributing to public enjoyment.

The Forest Service's major planned objective for the area is to reconstruct existing campground facilities. In addition, the area plan calls for constructing major forest roads to five areas that provide access to the lakes or are sites for potential development of several large, modern campgrounds. These campgrounds will replace the many small, scattered sites around Shasta Lake, which the Forest Service plans to close because they are costly to operate.

Mount Rogers National Recreation Area

The Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, located in the Jefferson National Forest in Virginia, was established in May 1966. The 154,000-acre area is characterized by scenic mountainous terrain, including Mount Rogers, the highest peak in Virginia. The area's landscape theme is rural America, and its intent is to retain and restore visual elements of early rural America, including stone bridges, rail fences, old mills, stone iron fences, and intermingled fields and forests. The Mount Rogers area is located in southwest Virginia. Included among the recreational opportunities at Mount Rogers are camping, picnicking, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, and swimming. Mount Rogers officials reported about 693,000 recreational visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

Mount Rogers' authorizing legislation calls for the Secretary of Agriculture to manage the area for public outdoor recreation benefits; conserve

scenic, scientific, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment; and manage, use, and dispose of natural resources in a manner compatible with and not significantly impairing, the recreation area's purposes. The Secretary of Agriculture was also authorized to acquire needed lands for the area and directed to institute an accelerated program of outdoor recreation facilities development. The Mount Rogers area has had two area plans—the first approved in 1968 and a revision prepared in 1980. The current plan calls for low-density recreation development.

Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area

The Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area, established in October 1968, is located in the northeastern corner of Utah and the southwest portion of Wyoming. One of the most popular activities in the area is boating on the 92-mile-long Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The Green River, below the Flaming Gorge Dam at the southern end of the Reservoir, is also popular with fishermen and floaters. In addition to water-oriented activities, recreation includes camping, hunting, and hiking. Area officials reported about 680,000 recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

The Congress created the area for the purpose of "public outdoor recreation use and enjoyment" and "the conservation of scenic, scientific, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment." The area plan, approved in October 1977, emphasized the recreational uses of the area and promoted appropriate multiple uses of the land. Many facilities needed for the varied recreation purposes were already in place at the time of the plan's issuance. They included 22 campgrounds and picnic sites, 9 boat ramps, 4 boat campsites, and 2 visitor centers. The area plan proposed (1) providing adequate water and sanitation facilities, (2) completing projects under construction, (3) expanding existing facilities when necessary, and (4) constructing needed new facilities.

Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area

The Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, established in March 1972, is a 41-mile strip of land on the central Oregon coast about 150 miles southwest of Portland, Oregon. Access to the area is via a U.S. highway, which roughly parallels the east boundary. About one-third of the 33,990-acre area contains active, open sand dunes. These dunes range from small dunes with crests 6 to 8 feet high to large dunes with heights to 300 feet above sea level and lengths to 5,000 feet. Two major rivers and four smaller streams dissect the area. The area has 32 freshwater lakes within its boundaries or adjacent to it. About 47 percent of the

area is open to off-road vehicles. Other recreation opportunities include camping, hiking, fishing, and environmental education and interpretation. Area officials reported approximately 1.4 million recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available). About one-quarter of the yearly visitors are off-road vehicle recreationists.

The law established the area "in order to provide for the public outdoor recreation use and enjoyment" and for "the conservation of scenic, scientific, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment." The area plan, approved in 1979, proposed managing the area to provide for a broad spectrum of recreation activities. It called for confining development to the perimeter, leaving the interior in an undeveloped state. It also called for retaining existing access roads and campgrounds and did not propose any new access roads to the beach. The area plan also provided for a formal visitor center, unmanned visitor contact stations at the north and south boundaries, and a moderate number of signs to help interpret resources.

Sawtooth National Recreation Area

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area is in the Sawtooth National Forest in central Idaho. The Congress designated the 756,000-acre area in August 1972. Located about 120 miles from Boise, Idaho, it is accessible by two state highways. The Sun Valley resort lies near the southern end. Three other communities lie within the area—Stanley, Lower Stanley, and Sawtooth City—offering restaurants, lodging, and other facilities. Encompassing parts of three mountain ranges, the area includes over 300 high mountain lakes and hundreds of streams. The area also contains the headwaters of several major Idaho rivers, most notably the Salmon River. In 1972, legislation established the 217,088-acre Sawtooth Wilderness, which makes up about 29 percent of the area. The area emphasizes a wide range of primitive and developed activities, including camping, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, fishing, and hunting. The area also offers boating and other water-related activities on the many lakes in the area, while the Salmon River provides white-water rafting opportunities. Area officials estimate that the area averages about 1 million recreation visitor days each year.

The area was established to ensure that the natural, scenic, historic, pastoral, and fish and wildlife values are preserved and protected and that recreation values are enhanced.

Hells Canyon National Recreation Area

The Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, established in December 1975, is located in west central Idaho and northeastern Oregon. It is about 4 hours driving time from Boise, Idaho, the nearest metropolitan area. The Snake River flows north through the 652,500-acre area, forming the boundary between the two states. The 67.5 miles of river have wild or scenic designations under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The area's terrain is rugged; elevations range from 9,393 feet to 800 feet, where the Snake River leaves the area. On three-quarters of the area, the ground slopes at 30 percent or more. Access within and to Hells Canyon is not easy. Approximately 79 percent of the area is roadless and undeveloped or is classified as wilderness. Only two unimproved roads in the area offer access to the Snake River. Fishing, hunting, sightseeing, and hiking are long-established pursuits in Hells Canyon. Trail riding and floating or jet boating on the Snake River are available to visitors. The area also contains prehistoric and historic sites. The estimated number of recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available) was 210,000.

The public law creating the area contained objectives that included providing public outdoor recreation; protecting the free-flowing nature of the rivers; conserving scenic, wilderness, cultural, and scientific values; and utilizing natural resources—such as timber, minerals, and rangeland—in a manner compatible with the other objectives. The law allowed 5 years for completion of an area plan. The Chief of the Forest Service approved the area plan in May 1981, but the resolution of appeals delayed release of the plan for implementation until April 1984. The plan emphasized improving vehicle access within the area and contained a facility development program over two 5-year periods.

Arapaho National Recreation Area

The Arapaho National Recreation Area is located in the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest in Colorado and was designated in October 1978. According to an area official, water-based recreation on five lakes is the major attraction of the 35,700-acre area. These lakes constitute the "Great Lakes of Colorado," a part of the Colorado-Big Thompson Water Diversion Project. The Arapaho area is located within a 2-hour drive of Denver, Colorado. The area's visitation was reported at 475,000 recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

Arapaho's authorizing legislation requires the Secretary of Agriculture to provide for public recreation and enjoyment; conservation and development of scenic, natural, historic, and pastoral values in the area; and use and management of natural resources in a manner compatible with

recreation objectives. The area plan was approved in January 1985. We were told that the plan recognized that public facility areas were overcrowded, and outlined a number of projects designed to improve available facilities and activities.

Rattlesnake National Recreation Area

The Rattlesnake National Recreation Area is located in the Lolo National Forest within 5 miles of Missoula, Montana. Established in October 1980, the area totals 61,000 acres, a major portion of which makes up the municipal watershed of Missoula. Valued for its solitude and free-flowing waters stored and used for municipal purposes, the area has long been used as a wilderness by residents of Montana. There are no public access roads within the area and no overnight campground facilities. Three trailheads provide walking access to about 230 miles of trail and primitive camping. The Forest Service estimates that there were about 6,000 recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

The law that created the area splits it into two almost equal portions. Approximately 33,000 acres, titled the Rattlesnake Wilderness, is to be managed under the Wilderness Act of 1964. The remainder of the area is managed for watershed, recreation, wildlife habitat, and ecological and educational purposes. The Forest Service area plan calls for limited improvements to trailhead facilities, including new toilets, an expanded parking area, and a horse-unloading ramp scheduled for 1991.

Admiralty Island National Monument

Admiralty Island National Monument, in Alaska's Tongass National Forest, is accessible only by air and water. The 969,600-acre area was designated in December 1980. The island lies in the southeastern portion of the state. The island's northeastern shore is within 10 miles of Juneau, Alaska's capital. Mountains running north to south divide the forest-covered island.

The area offers dispersed primitive recreation, with opportunities for solitude, hunting, fishing, boating, backpacking, cross-country skiing, and bird watching. In addition, the designating legislation allows an existing special-use permit for a lake lodge resort to continue as long as the management of the lodge remains consistent with the purposes of the area. According to an area official, in addition to visiting the island, many people view it from tour boats and planes. The area had about 293,000 recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

The designating legislation calls for protecting objects of ecological, cultural, geologic, historic, prehistoric, and scientific interests. Currently, the area has 12 primitive public recreation cabins, 6 trail shelters, 1 resort, and 24 miles of trail. The 8 miles of road, providing access to the Greens Creek Mine, is allowed under the enabling legislation. The cabins, shelters, and resort offer a primitive experience, since they have no power or water and offer only pit toilets, and there are limited plans for additional facilities. The Forest Service plans to continue development of the Admiralty Island Water Trail as part of the National Recreation Trail System, including three foot trails. The area plan also calls for replacing a bear observatory.

Misty Fiords National Monument

Misty Fiords National Monument, in Alaska's Tongass National Forest, is accessible only by air or water. The 2,294,300-acre monument, established in December 1980, is 25 air miles from Ketchikan, Alaska. Bounded by sheer granite cliffs, it is made up of both mainland property and small islands. Over 100 trout-filled lakes, densely timbered river valleys, and streams containing salmon are included in the area. In addition to being able to view the area from tour boats and planes, visitors can hike, camp, cross-country ski, rock climb, and take nature photographs. The area had an estimated 194,000 recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

The designating legislation states that the area is to be managed to protect objects of ecological, cultural, geologic, historic, prehistoric, and scientific interest. As of October 1988, the area offered 14 primitive recreation cabins, 4 shelters, and 22 miles of maintained trails.

According to an area official, the current area plan calls for little change in facility development. He said more shelters may be built to protect hikers from storms, and plans include adding to the existing trail system. In addition, area officials are exploring the offering of interpretive services on tour boats in partnership with private businesses.

Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument

On May 18, 1980, after 123 quiet years, Mount St. Helens in southwest Washington State erupted, blasting 1,300 feet from its summit and transforming the green forest around it into a blown-down, gray landscape. The 110,000-acre Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument was created in 1982 and is within a 4-hour drive of Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington. Within the monument, Forest Service roads wind through forest where a layer of pumice is the only sign of recent

volcanic activity, then enter a transition zone where trees were killed but left standing, and end within the blown-down blast area. Turnouts along the road provide access to hiking trails and vistas of mudflows and older volcanoes: Mount Hood to the south, Mount Adams to the east, and Mount Rainier to the north. One lookout, Windy Ridge, is within 3.5 miles of the crater and provides a breathtaking panorama of the volcano, the building lava dome at its base, and the stark landscape created by the eruption. Naturalist activities and interpretive talks are presented by Forest Service personnel to help visitors understand and enjoy this special place, and a new visitor center—opened in 1986 and only 5 miles from an interstate highway—offers displays featuring the 1980 eruption and explaining Mount St. Helens history. The Forest Service estimated that there were approximately 1 million recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

The public law establishing the monument provided for protecting significant features, allowing geologic forces and ecological succession to continue unimpeded, and permitting scientific and recreation uses. The area plan, completed in 1985, presents the Forest Service's approach to preserving the natural processes while providing for construction of trails, roads, and the associated support facilities needed for full recreation use and enjoyment. Many of the recreation construction projects listed in the plan are to replace facilities lost during the eruption: over 200 miles of roads and viewpoints, 97 miles of trails, 244 camp units, and 54 picnic units were damaged or destroyed. The plan calls for reestablishing road access to safe viewing points, constructing a primary visitor center, building day-use facilities and interpretive displays at key viewing points, and recreating an extensive trail system.

White Rocks National Recreation Area

White Rocks National Recreation Area was established in June 1984 and lies within the Manchester Ranger District of the Green Mountain National Forest. Known for its white rock cliffs and ice bed area, the 36,400-acre area is traversed by a portion of the Appalachian Trail. White Rocks was established to preserve and protect existing wilderness values and promote wildlife habitat watershed protection, opportunities for primitive and semiprimitive recreation, and scenic ecological and scientific values. The area is located in south central Vermont and is accessible from nearby highways. The area had about 39,000 recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

The legislation establishing the area calls for the promotion of primitive and semiprimitive recreation usages. Approved on January 30, 1986,

the area plan calls for the development of some winter and summer trails, more camp sites, and additional parking facilities.

Oregon Cascades National Management Emphasis Area

The Oregon Cascades Recreation Area, which the Forest Service manages as a national management emphasis area, was established in June 1984 and is located in southwest Oregon along the spine of the Cascade Mountain range north of Crater Lake National Park. Portland, Oregon, is about a 4-hour drive via interstate and state highways. The 156,900-acre area includes 70,800 acres of designated wilderness and a section of the popular Pacific Crest Trail. The area is largely roadless and has only hike-in campgrounds. It offers no information and interpretive services. The recreation opportunities available in the area include fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing. The nonwilderness parts of the area offer a back-country experience for drivers of off-road vehicles and an alternative to off-road driving at the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area. The area had about 6,600 recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

The enabling legislation, among other things, directed the Forest Service to maintain the natural scenic characteristics of the area to the extent practicable, and to provide for the use of motorized recreation vehicles. The draft area plan calls for low-intensity, semiprimitive use. Although trails are to be improved and expanded, no new facilities are proposed or anticipated for the area.

Mount Baker National Recreation Area

The Mount Baker National Recreation Area, established in July 1984, consists of 8,600 acres on the south slope of Mount Baker, located about 100 miles north of Seattle, Washington. The area consists primarily of four large subalpine meadow systems with panoramic views of the 10,778-foot summit of this dormant volcano, which is capped with snow year-round. The area is rich with interesting geologic features associated with glaciation and volcanism. The Sulphur Creek lava flow and Rocky Creek mudflows are visible from many points within the area. Also, the ancient remains of cinder cones and a massive trench carved by the action of a glacier are accessible for exploration. Access to the area is primarily limited to a single unpaved Forest Service road, which leads to a trailhead and several high mountain trails. In summer, the area is popular with day hikers, backpackers, mountaineers, and horse groups. The area offers only back-country camping, with access only by trail. In winter, the area offers perhaps the finest off-road snowmobiling

found in the Northwest, as well as consistently good nordic skiing conditions. The Forest Service reported about 12,000 recreation visitor days to the area in fiscal year 1988 (latest information available).

The area was designated as part of the Washington State Wilderness Act, with direction to manage the recreation area in a manner to best provide public outdoor recreation (including but not limited to snowmobile use); conserve scenic, natural, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment; and manage natural resources in a manner compatible with the purposes of the recreation area. According to an area official, between 1984, the year the area was established, and 1988, the Forest Service has essentially managed the area at the same level as before designation. About 20 miles of hiking and horse trails provide the major recreation activity. A draft area plan to provide specific direction for the administration, development, and operation of the Mount Baker area was circulated for public input in late 1988. The draft plan includes proposals for improving and expanding the trail system, adding sanitation facilities, enlarging the trailheads to accommodate horse trailers, and adding signs to provide information on recreation opportunities and limitations, and descriptions of natural and scenic features.

North Cascades National Scenic Area

The North Cascades Scenic Highway, managed by the Forest Service as a national scenic area, is located in Washington State's Okanogan and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forests and was designated in July 1984. The 87,600-acre area, located about 140 miles north of Seattle, Washington, is divided by a state highway providing the northernmost route through Washington's rugged Cascade Mountains. The recreation activities include camping, hiking, fishing, helicopter skiing, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, bicycling, driving for pleasure, and viewing scenery. The area had approximately 172,100 recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

The enabling legislation calls for the preservation and protection of the area's scenic beauty and recreation qualities for future generations. As of July 1988, the area offered a picnic area, two campgrounds, and trails. The draft plan calls for developing various new facilities or major upgrades to facilities, such as a visitor center, additional highway overlooks, picnic areas, campgrounds, and trail loops. Trails will be maintained to a level appropriate for nonmotorized users.

Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area

Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area, designated in September 1984, is located in east central California about 70 miles east of the Yosemite National Park headquarters and within a few miles of the Nevada border. It is accessible by state and U.S. highways. San Francisco is the nearest major city, about 4 hours driving time away. The landscape consists of a broad shallow basin with Mono Lake in the middle. Mono Lake is a salt lake, 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. The area includes about 115,600 acres. Because it is on the Pacific flyway, it is popular with bird watchers. The lake's tufa towers, limestone formations similar to stalagmites found in caves, is a scenic attraction, as are the nearby volcanic domes and craters. The area has several interpretive sites and a county-operated picnic area with restrooms. The area has no overnight camping facilities. The area had an estimated 78,200 recreation visitor days in fiscal year 1987 (latest information available).

The public law designating the scenic area provided for the protection of the area's geologic, ecological, and cultural resources, as well as for recreation and interpretive use and scientific research. The law made these provisions subordinate to protecting the existing water rights of the state of California. The act also required a study of the ecology of the scenic area by the National Academy of Sciences and authorized construction of a visitor center.

The Forest Service released a draft environmental impact statement and area plan in September 1988. The draft plan's preferred alternative emphasizes interpretive opportunities and the possible construction of a campground. The area received funding for a visitor center in fiscal year 1988 and expects to have a $4.3 million center completed in 1990.

Allegheny National Recreation Area

The Allegheny National Recreation Area, located in the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania, was designated in October 1984. The area is easily accessible by state highways and is about 160 miles from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. According to a Forest Service official, a portion of the area makes up part of the Allegheny front, which is primarily wilderness and undeveloped forest land. He explained that it is used for low-development recreation opportunities—such as hiking, dispersed camping, and hunting, since it is next to a designated wilderness. He also noted that the area includes part of the Allegheny reservoir, which offers more developed recreation facilities, such as campgrounds and boat launches, in addition to hiking trails. Forest Service officials report that all facilities are in fair condition, with the exception of the

boat launches and a water and sanitation system, which are in good condition. In fiscal year 1987 (latest information available), the area had an estimated 174,000 recreation visitor days.

The legislation that designated the area calls for managing the area for outdoor recreation purposes; conservation of fish and wildlife; protection of watersheds; maintenance of free-flowing streams; conservation of scenic, cultural, and other natural values of the area; and development of resources while minimizing environmental disturbances such development causes. A Forest Service official explained that the Forest Service has not added any new facilities since designation, pending the development of an implementation plan with specific objectives.

Pine Ridge National Recreation Area

The Pine Ridge National Recreation Area was designated in October 1986 and is located in northwest Nebraska approximately 300 miles from Denver, Colorado. The 6,600-acre area, in the Nebraska National Forest, is a unique island of wildlands, home to a thriving elk herd, in an area of agricultural development. The area offers primitive and semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation, such as camping, hiking, picnicking, horseback riding, and hunting. Area officials estimated 200 recreation visitor days in 1987 and 500 in 1988 (latest information available). The area manager believes that this increase in visitors resulted from local publicity on the designation of the area. As of December 1988, the area had two trails, one picnic area, and one toilet.

The enabling legislation directed the Pine Ridge area to be managed to allow the continuation of existing primitive and semiprimitive recreation use; to preserve and protect the forest, aquatic, and grassland habitat; to protect and conserve special areas having uncommon or outstanding wilderness, biological, geologic, recreational, cultural, historic, archeological, scientific, or other values; to allow the continuation of existing livestock grazing uses; to control noxious weeds and insects; and to control fires.

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, established in November 1986, includes portions of the Columbia River Gorge along the Washington and Oregon boundary. The area is within a 1-hour drive of Portland, Oregon, by way of a major interstate highway that runs through most of the area. The 285,100-acre area is managed by the Forest Service in cooperation with the Columbia River Gorge commission. The area, part of both the Gifford Pinchot and Mount Hood National

Forests, offers river-oriented activities, hiking, and day-use opportunities. The enabling legislation calls for protecting and enhancing scenic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources of the Columbia River Gorge. According to Forest Service officials, the area plan is expected to be approved by 1990 or 1991. Several facilities, including an interpretive center and a conference center, are specifically mentioned in the law.

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